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ABSTRACT

This paper reports some of the findings of Project Focus which relate to the community college president. Project Focus, a nationwide study of the community college and its key constituents (students, faculty, presidents, and state administrators), sought to determine perceptions of the goals of the community college, emerging governance patterns, future sources of fiscla support, and trends affecting the future of the community college. Among the findings discussed are: a consensus was emerging on the goal of the community college, "to provide some form of education for any student regardless of academic ability"; guidance and counseling and innovation in programs were viewed as having a high priority level under both ample and stringent budgetary conditions, while continuing education had a relatively low institutional priority; state control was seen as becoming a more important factor in institutional operation with potential impact on institutional mission; the role of the president was seen as that of leader, decision-maker, and coordinator; and pressures for educational opportunity, job training/retraining, more leisure time, rising operational costs, and competition for resources were viewed as factors affecting the future of the community college. (JDS)

The Priorities and Problems of a Community College President

by

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The Priorities and Problems of a Community College President

David S. Bushnell*

For the past two decades, the public community college has been the fair haired child of parents, local taxpayers, state officials, and most importantly, aspiring students. No other educational institution has been the focus of such optimistic pronouncements and radiant hopes as has this American invention. Its rate of growth has inspired the movement's more catholic supporters to label it the unique educational achievement of the 20th century. Less ardent supporters worry whether community colleges are the "coming slums of higher education."[1] Which of these observations are correct? Who is and who should be served and how have become the basic questions for presidents to ponder as issues of quality begin to replace logistical concerns.

As recently as 1960 Leland Medsker in his book The Junior College: Progress and Prospect[2] evidenced a concern for the lack of consensus among student, faculty, and administrators on the proper role of community colleges. Robert Hutchins in 1964 described the community college movement as "confused, confusing, and contradictory ... it is generous, ignoble, bold, timid, naive, and optimistic. It's heart is in the right place, but its head does not work very well."[3] Since that time, however, there has been a dramatic upsurge in agreement among both

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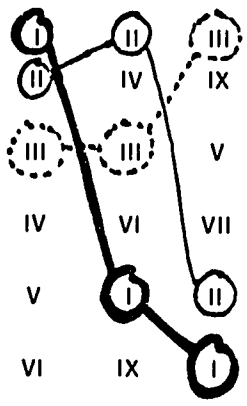
critics and supporters on the role of the community college (in contrast with the sometimes agonizing debates among universities and four year colleges on the goals which their institutions ought to serve).

Concensus among community college administrators, faculty, and students does exist on those goals which emphasize openness, meeting community needs, and serving the career interest of both the academic and occupationally oriented students. (See Chart 1) Where differences do exist, it is a matter of priority. Top administrators are more concerned with responding to community needs; faculty place greater stress upon the student's personal development, while students tend to emphasize more egalitarian goals, like providing financial aid to any student who wants to enroll, regardless of his previous track record.

What is the role of community colleges within our pluralistic society? Are they in fact second-rate institutions which serve to "cool-out" the less promising student, thereby preserving the status quo of the more elite 4-year institutions? The study by Ed Gleazer and myself undertaken almost three years ago provides a new set of data upon which to draw. Key constituent groups--students, faculty, administrators, local community leaders, and state education representatives--were interviewed and surveyed during the winter and spring of 1971. The results of that study, reported recently in two volumes published by McGraw-Hill,[4] confirm some already recognized trends and shed some light on the topic to be considered here. How

Chart 1. Community College Goal Preferences for the 70's *(Rank Order of Top Ranked Goals as Perceived by Presidents, Faculty, and Students Spring 1971)*

Goal	Presidents	Faculty	Students
Serve higher education needs of youth from local community	I	II	III
Respond to needs of local community	II	IV	IX
Help students adapt to new occupational requirements	III	III	V
Re-educate and retrain those whose vocational capabilities are obsolete	IV	VI	VII
Help students respect own abilities and limitations	V	I	II
Make financial assistance available to any student who wants to enroll	VI	IX	I
Ensure faculty participation in institutional decision-making	VIII	V	X
Provide some form of education for any student regardless of academic ability	VII	VII	IV
Help formulate programs in a number of public policy areas, e.g., pollution control	X	VII	VI



presidents of these institutions see their role, the problems they anticipate, and their hopes for the future will be the principle issues under discussion today.

Presidents' Perceptions of Goals. As early as 1948, the Truman Commission on Higher Education noted the need for expanded educational opportunities beyond high school. Members of the Commission made much of the fact that 49% of those conscripted for military duty had the capability to complete 14 or more years of education (according to their scores on standardized achievement tests). The Commission concluded that "the time has come to make education through the 14th grade available in the same way that high school is now available."[5] Opening the doors of higher education to veterans and other candidates regardless of race, religion, or wealth was at that time a dramatic departure from the usual concept of selectivity.

Since that date, public community colleges have made dramatic strides in filling this void. Just how dramatic was revealed in the survey results taken from the findings of Project Focus.

Before sharing some of those findings with you, let me comment on how Project Focus was implemented. The focus of Project Focus was on five areas of concern: (1) What types of students were being se ed; (2) What goals were being served; (3) What were the emerging organizational and governance patterns (who calls the shots, where is locus of power); (4) What are likely to be the future sources of financial support; and (5) What trends will shape the future role of community colleges? Through interviews (with over 1500 local and state

representatives located in 30 institutions in 20 different states), survey questionnaires (10,000 students, 3,000 faculty, and 90 presidents), together with extensive information on each of the institutions randomly selected for participation in the study, the background, and expectations of these various groups were analyzed in depth.

Presidents were asked to reveal what goals should be stressed during this decade. Students and faculty were asked to evaluate their own institution on how well the promise of equal educational opportunities was being met. It was the hope of the Project Focus team that by assessing how well specific goals were being implemented and noting the discrepancies between the promise and the practice of these goals that needed changes could be identified and reforms implemented before the still-young movement became immobilized by creeping bureaucracy.

The study findings established beyond a doubt that there is an emerging consensus on the goals to be served by community colleges. Presidents, faculty and students surveyed were asked to respond to a list of goal statements in two ways: First, they were asked to rate the statement in terms of how much emphasis <u>is</u> currently being placed on the goals at their institution, and second, the items were to be rated in terms of what institutions' goals <u>should</u> be during the coming decade. Each goal statement in terms of current emphasis was rated on a 5-point scale from (1) emphasized very strongly down to (5) emphasized not at all. In terms of what the institutions' goals should be, the "preferred" goals, the respondents were asked to judge the degree of

importance of the goal item on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) of extremely high importance to (5) of no importance.*

Presidents confirmed the suspicion of many faculty members that they prefer their own counsel on matters of policy. Faculty and students in the past have not been privy to the thinking behind many of the major decisions effecting their work or learning opportunities. Faculty groups are invited to advise but not often delegated to policy making responsibilities. In this sense, governance structures at community colleges are more like the public elementary and secondary schools than institutions of higher education. However, our study showed that while presidents like the current state of affairs, faculties and students are showing less willingness to sit passively by while policy decisions are being made for them. Reference to Chart 1 will show that faculty members rank the goal of "insuring faculty participation in institutional decision making" 5th while presidents give it a ranking of 8th or in the lower third of their priorities. They tend to value the importance of "insuring faculty participation in decision making" slightly higher than that of "insuring student participation" but indicate that they feel too much emphasis is currently being placed on this goal by faculty and students. The faculty in contrast, rate the goal as extremely important. Contrast this response with their rating of the importance of "insuring student

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*The items selected were part of a larger instrument, the Institutional Goals Inventory, developed and copyrighted by the Educational Testing Service. This modified instrument was adapted and reproduced with their permission. Institutions wishing to administer such an inventory will be able to compare their mean scores and perceptions with a large body of normative data available through ETS.

participation (10th in their rank order of preferred goals) - a not unexpected response. While faculty are committed to student development, they are not fully in favor of providing students with an equal voice on matters of policy.

Recognizing that presidents assign the involvement of both faculty and students in policy making to a position of lower priority than do students and faculty, we were tempted to conclude that the pressure from students and faculty for greater involvement has been counter-balanced by the reluctance of presidents to yield further on this issue. This apparent state of equilibrium, with students and faculty feeling they should have a little more representation and presidents feeling that they should have a little less, may well represent the most expedient arrangement at this stage of development.

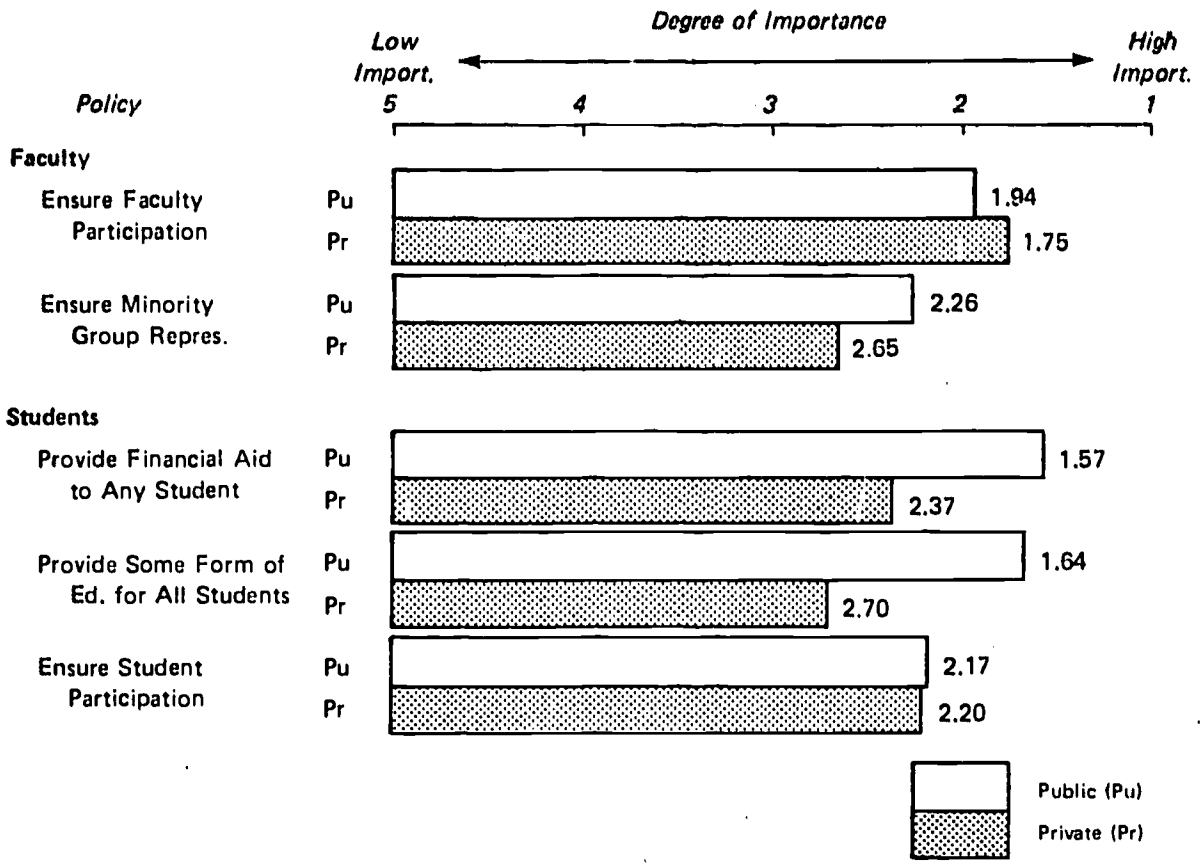
It is interesting to note that presidents and faculty agree on the preferred ranking of the goal item "to provide some form of education for any student regardless of academic ability". A comparison of the presidents and faculties rating of how much emphasis is currently being given to this goal, however, reveals that faculty see it as being much more a part of the current emphasis at their institution than perhaps it should be. In terms of present emphasis, presidents rank this item as 7th while faculty give it a ranking of 2nd. Thus the discrepancy between what ought to be and what is the current practice with regard to the open door policy, the faculty feel that this goal should receive less attention than it is currently receiving. The conclusion one might draw from this somewhat surprising finding is that the faculty carry most of the burden

for accommodating the widely varying student needs present in the classrooms of the open door college. Faculties are saying that they would like less heterogenity which suggests that the open door concept has not yet been fully accepted by community college staffs.

On this same issue, a contrast of public and private junior college presidents' views (see Chart 2) on the degree of importance of providing some form of education for any student regardless of academic ability shows that the private junior college presidents place greater stress on the intellectual, psychological, and moral development of students, while public community college presidents stress meeting the financial and educational needs of all students regardless of their academic abilities. The numbers at the end of the bar charts are the mean scores assigned by respondents to each of the policy or goal areas reported. Insuring faculty participation is slightly more important in private junior colleges than it is in the public institutions. On the other hand insuring minority representation on the college staff is considerably more important to the presidents of public institutions.

Other findings not shown here indicate that private junior college presidents are much more concerned with increasing the number and diversity of sources of income, clearly defining institutional purposes, and encouraging mutual trust and respect among the faculty, students and administrators than are public community college presidents. The latter group, on the other hand, tend to value as we have seen egalitarian goals such as helping students adapt to new occupational

Chart 2. Contrasting Perceptions of Public and Private Jr. College Presidents *(mean scores)*

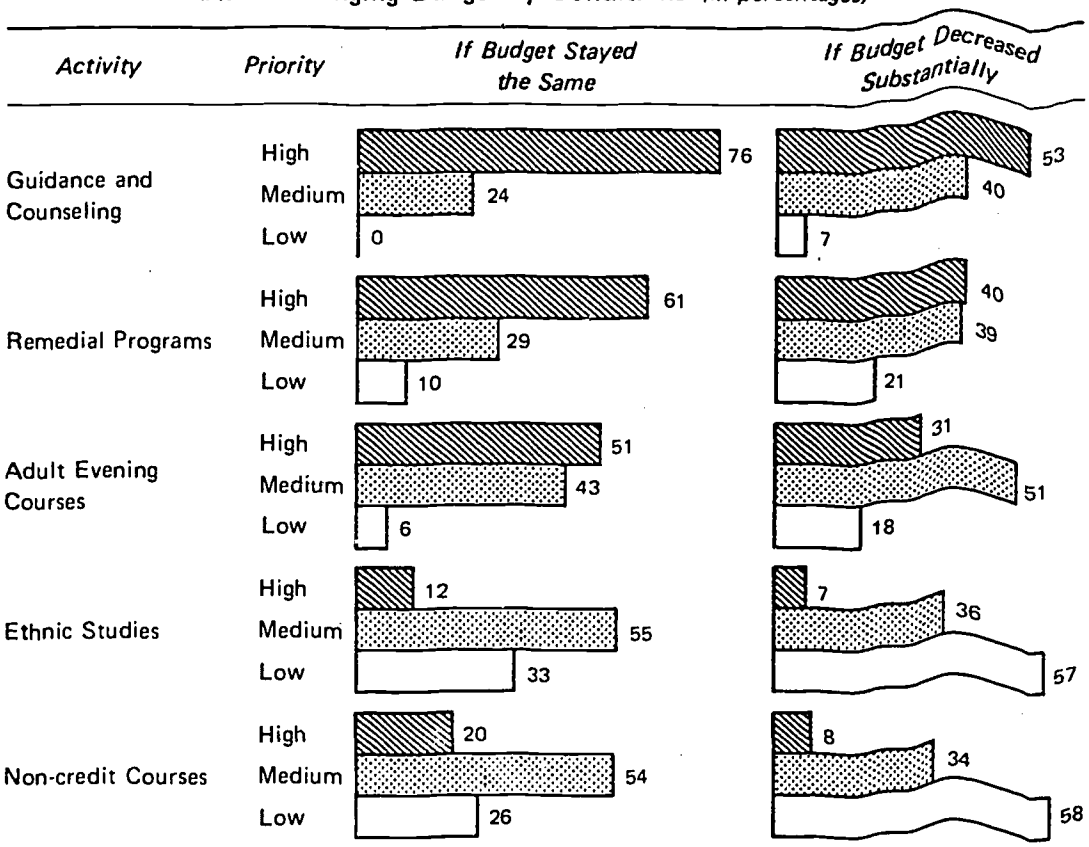


requirements. While these findings are not to imply that private junior colleges are any the less student-oriented, it does point out the fact that the presidents of these institutions are less likely to be concerned with opening their doors to all applicants, regardless of their qualifications. As an aside, the concern of private junior colleges with selectivity might very well be turned to their advantage if such institutions were to focus their attention on students with special needs, e.g. students with poorly developed communication skills, students who speak English as a second language, disadvantaged students, mentally handicapped students, etc. While public institutions stress comprehensiveness, private junior colleges with their greater degree of autonomy and self directedness, could very well strengthen their competitive positions vis a vis public community colleges if they were to aggressively recruit students with special needs.

Changing Priorities

Presidents of the 90 institutions surveyed were asked to assign under three different budget statuses (stringent, unchanged, and ample) a high, medium, or low priority to a number of college activities. Chart 3 illustrates what happens when budgets are allowed to vary. Guidance and counseling, for example, continues at a high priority level even under stringent budget conditions. 53% of the presidents responded by giving this particular activity a high priority rating even if faced with severe budget constraints. Ethnic studies, by contrast, slips to a much lower status with 57% of the presidents rating it as a low priority under stringent conditions. Non-credit courses receive middle priority ratings

Chart 3. Community College Presidents Perceptions of Program Priorities Under Changing Budgetary Conditions *(in percentages)*



under the same budget status over the decade but slips dramatically to a low-priority status if financial resources were cut back.

Continuing education as a priority area of concern tends to occupy a relatively low priority status because such programs are sometimes perceived as peripheral to the main thrust of the college. When faced with the necessity of budget cutbacks, the presidents of public community colleges often discover that the only major budgetary item amenable to reduction is the adult education budget. Many of the faculty employed in this area are non-tenured and part-time, thus making them more vulnerable than their tenured counterparts.

This observation can be further supported by examining state budgets. Only a few states currently provide separate funding for adult continuing education. Duplicating and overlapping responsibilities among various educational institutions conspire to dilute the appeal of these programs for a sizable segment of the adult population. The tendency of chief executive officers to continue to back traditional programs and to cut back on less well established programs opens to question the ability of community colleges to effectively serve the emergent requirements of the community. Community colleges have no corner on the "institutional inertia" market, however. Better renewal mechanisms must be discovered if this community-oriented form of "relevant education" is to remain relevant.

New Innovative Programs

To ascertain whether or not community junior colleges should continue to be numbered among the more innovative post-secondary institutions, a number of questions were asked to the presidents concerning

their current use or planned use of some of the more innovative educational practices or concepts to emerge in recent years. Chart 4 summarizes their response to 14 innovative items, each of which was defined briefly in the questionnaire.

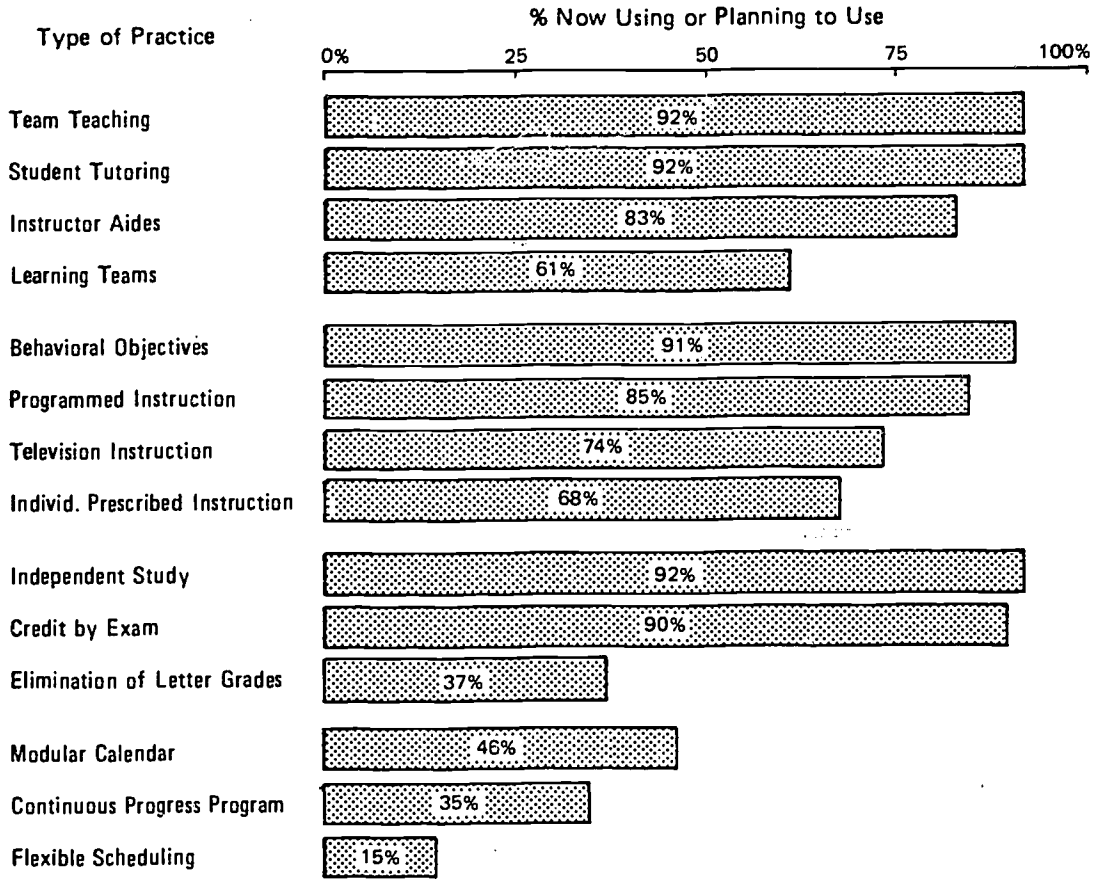
New ways of grouping students and the use of students as teacher-aids has received widespread acceptance. The one exception seems to be the use of learning teams defined as "small group of faculty and students getting together to jointly plan and carry out an agreed upon program of study." The wide acceptance of "behavioral objectives" and "programmed instruction" was also in evidence. External degree programs defined as "receiving course credit (for any course) by passing examinations or otherwise demonstrating competence without formally taking the course" while currently not in widespread usage, is actively under consideration by a number of institutions. Modularized scheduling, and continuous progress programming, on the other hand, is not now being exploited to any great extent nor do the presidents see such programs being adopted in the near future.

One practice which was not much in evidence three years ago was that of planning, programming, and budgeting (PPB). While that status may have changed, only 7% of the community college presidents and none of the private junior college presidents indicated that their institutions had adopted the PPB system of budgeting. Thirty-three percent and 74% of the community and junior college presidents, respectively, responded that they had no plans for adopting PPB.

Who Will Call the Shots?

Our study findings indicated presidents feel more decisions

Chart 4. New Instructional Practices and Programs



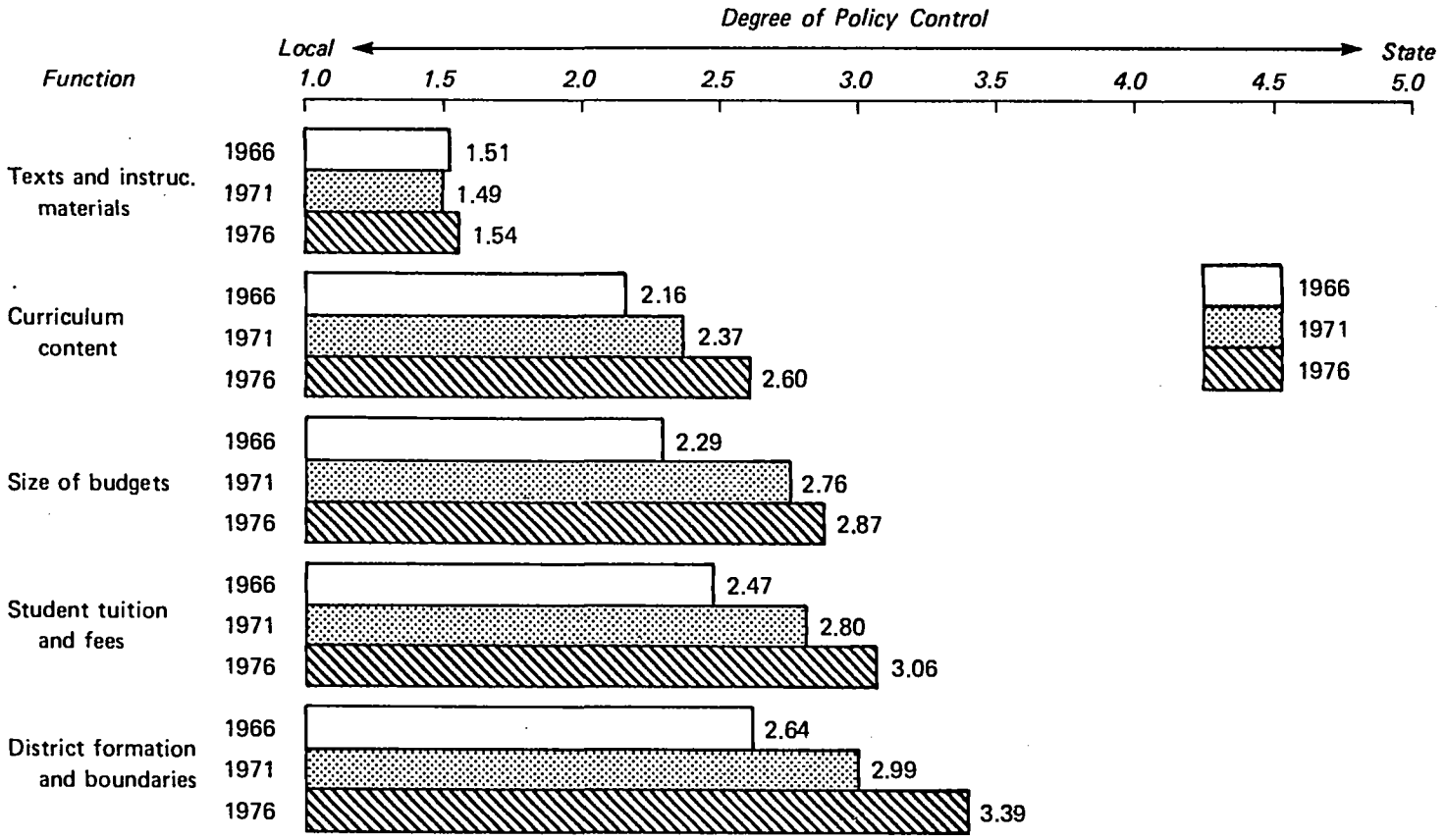
are and will be made at the state capital. The state legislature, the governor's office, and state educational agencies are playing an increasing part in shaping policies which influence local programs (see Chart 5). This movement toward greater state level control is working at cross purposes with the rising demand on the college to be more responsive to the needs of local constituents, both on and off campus. The result is growing tension and struggle for increased decision-making authority.

In one of our interviews, a state director of community colleges was troubled that legislators and other officials tended to look only at the budget and not the mission of the institution. "They can cut the budget and distort the mission. The basic question seems to be, what is it going to cost...legislators are talking in terms of output-input ratios and productivity figures. I am wondering how they will define those terms." As costs continue to go up and available educational dollars become scarcer, responsible state officials will want to know what they are getting for their money. Constructive tension between local and state forces may hinge upon the respect state level leadership evidence for the capacity of the local leadership to involve interested constituents and maintain their support for a college's program.

New sources of financial support must be discovered. The community college, like most of public education, has in the past depended primarily upon local tax support but now much look to the state as its primary source of financial support. What the state

Chart 5. Local and State Policy-Making Control

(Public Institutions Only)



will in the future be willing to pay for has a lot to do with the kind of collective demands expressed by a major proportion of the state's voting public. Financial support equations geared to the "full-time equivalent" student may well impede rather than facilitate movement toward the more important goals of the community college. If, as many in the community college movement believe, the continuing and adult education role will be its most important future function, then other support mechanisms or formulas must be found. Traditions, state laws and regulations, and competing higher educational requirements can have the effect of restricting the flexibility and adaptability of the local institution.

At the local level, obsolete structures which tend to benefit staff and not the student are no longer being tolerated. The emergence of "results-oriented" administrative systems where the success of the institution can be judged on the basis of its impact on students and on the community has already been noted. Such an approach, however, if applied without consideration of the interests of those directly involved, can foster resistance if imposed from the top down in the name of efficiency. Shared decision-making and a sense of involvement with key decisions can go a long way to alleviate this potential hazard. The role of the president is emerging as that of leader, decision-maker, and coordinator. His primary function will be to maintain the loyalty and support of all factions making up the campus community.

Future Functions. In conclusion, the dilemma currently confronting the community colleges of this country can be neatly summed up in the following quote from the Newman report on higher education: "The public, and especially the four-year colleges, are shifting more and

more responsibility onto the two-year colleges for undertaking the tougher tasks of higher education. Simultaneously, the problems we have already identified--the poor match of the student's style of learning and the institutions' style of teaching, the lock-step pressure to attend college directly after high school, the over-emphasis on credentials--are overtaking the community colleges and rendering them ill-equipped to perform the immense task they have been given."[6] While these are the issues confronting those responsible for making our community colleges work, there is increasing evidence that community colleges will continue to play a prominent role in facilitating the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society.

What present-day forces already set in motion are likely to shape the future functions of community colleges? Here are some of these trends together with a brief prediction of their likely impact:

1. The demand for equal educational opportunities will continue unabated. Disadvantaged and minority groups will argue for a more equitable distribution of resources, so that public education through the fourteenth year will become more and more a reality for all who want to take advantage of it.

2. The movement of war babies from late adolescence to early adulthood is already presaging a sharp rise in the number of 20 to 35-year-olds seeking work. The shock of competition in the labor market of both the young adults and those in mid-career will force many to seek out at community colleges additional occupational training as well as retraining for higher level responsibilities.

3. The demand for white collar workers and technical level personnel will continue to expand rapidly, particularly in the service occupations, while a number of blue collar, production-oriented occupations will likely decline. More women will be seeking employment or opportunities to refurbish their occupational skills in order to re-enter the labor market once their children reach school age.

4. The values associated with work are changing. Rather than being perceived as a measure of a man's personal worth, work is increasingly viewed as a means to an end. A consumption-oriented society, with its emphasis on high productivity and the automation of production methods, is leading to increased leisure and higher levels of income. More leisure, particularly among those in middle-level occupations, will create an increased demand for education and enrichment programs oriented towards strengthening one's avocational interests. Learning and creative self expression are close corollaries of the desire to utilize one's leisure in a more rewarding fashion.

5. The demand for liberal arts education, particularly among adults, will require increased flexibility and trained staff members who are capable of working with the mature student. Improved ways of articulating the various disciplines (both horizontally and vertically) will be required to aid citizens in problem-solving and decision-making. Clustered courses and core curricula will help to eliminate the current separation of disciplines. Part-time enrollment, intermittent enrollment, and other forms of non-traditional study offer promising alternatives to the more conventional scheduling of courses.

6. The rise in the cost of education, and its prominence as a budget item, will force state legislators and educational officials to carefully scrutinize budget requests and to seek additional sources of funding. The competition for scarce dollars among the various social services (environmental protection, expanded health services, expanded welfare programs, etc.) will force state educational authorities to establish or revise master plans for higher education, with emphasis upon utilizing already existing resources. Budget pressures will bring with them a rising concern for accountability and ways of measuring the output of our educational institutions.

In closing, let me observe that our capacity for creativity and innovation in this country has found one of its more noteworthy expressions in the creation of a nationwide network of community colleges. Demands for equal educational opportunities, social reforms, and individual self-awareness are being met through these institutions. While their ultimate impact is yet to be determined, they have already earned themselves a prominent role in meeting the needs of a large segment of our society.

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